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CAN STUDENTS LEARN TO READ THE CLASSICS?

The idea is abroad in the land that students of the Classics, no matter how many years they spend in the study of them, do not gain the same knowledge of those languages and the same facility in their use as do the students of the Modern languages. The inference drawn from this is that one would better spend his time upon Modern languages than upon the Classics.

To the writer this seems to be a question open to debate, a question which, if a decision is possible, must be decided by those who have worked in both classes of language and read their literatures.

But from what point shall we take our departure? If it is a question of commercial value no one would advise the acquisition of Greek and Latin rather than French and German or any other modern language; for the ancient languages are nowhere spoken, while the modern languages are used to-day over wide areas and it is possible that a student of a modern language may some time have occasion to use it in the ordinary business of life.

Still the study of the ancient versus the modern languages can not be debated on this ground, since this is not the reason why they are studied in school and college, nor is it one of the reasons which the teachers of modern languages put forward in favor of the study of them. Nor can it be said that students who have pursued those languages in school and college can write or speak them when they have finished their college course, unless the work of the classroom has been supplemented by work in a club which has this end in view. Here and there a teacher may put special emphasis on trying to teach his pupils to speak and write the particular modern language which he is teaching, but the writer believes that he is correct in saying that the large majority of teachers do not do this.

What then are language teachers in this country trying to do? They are trying to teach their pupils so much of any language as shall enable them to read its literature. That is all. Of course, questions at once arise in one's mind as to the cultural value of the various languages, as to the value of their literatures, etc., but these are not germane to the main point at issue as stated above.

If the writer's experience is of any value, and it is only on the basis of our own experience that we discuss any question, the ordinary student in this country does acquire a greater knowledge and facility in the use of modern languages than of the ancient. And yet this difference is not so great in degree as is thought in many quarters, since no student of language gets beyond the use of his dictionary and grammar. And right here we have the basis for a comparison. The less a student is obliged to lean upon these two aids the greater his knowledge

of a language. To what then is the difference due? To this, that the modern languages are more like the English than the ancient in that they are analytic, so that their grammar is easier to learn; and the ideas expressed in the literature which the modern language student reads are more like the ideas expressed in his mother tongue. The difference in facility would be lessened somewhat if the student of ancient languages were required to read literature of the same character as the modern language student. But this is not the case. The student of Latin is not led on by easy stages from his beginning book to more lengthy and difficult literature, but is plunged at once into 'Caesar, four books'. The same is the case with the Greek, only more so. That this is not the best pedagogical theory is not stated here. We are trying to keep to the point at issue.

Another reason for greater facility is the student's attitude of mind. He believes that the modern languages are more "practical, because they are living, while the ancient are dead", and it requires some thought on his part to realize and a good deal of explanation on the part of the teacher to show that the dead languages are not dead, but very much alive.

The average student, if there is such a person, does not give the ancient languages a fair show, does not apply himself to their acquisition with the same spirit with which he attacks modern languages, but uses every means to lighten, as he thinks, his task. To learn anything is a task; it is the spirit with which one goes to work which makes the task a pleasure or a burden. There is no harder work than football, though the football enthusiast does not count it so. The do or die spirit will conquer anywhere. So I venture to say that the student who goes at Greek or Latin with the same spirit with which he studies French or German will find a fair measure of success attainable. He will find that he can read Greek, Latin, French or German of the same degree of difficulty with equal ease and understanding.

I have said that the reason why a student learns modern languages more easily than ancient is partly due to the relative difficulty of the two classes of languages, partly to the spirit with which the student works. There is a third party in this business, the teacher. How should he go to work to aid his pupils in the acquisition of a language? To my mind all languages should be taught in the same way, translation, writing, reading aloud, learning by heart. I omit speaking the language, because as languages are taught in the schools the aim is not ability to speak, but to understand the written language.

It may seem that translation is the sum of the whole matter, but it is not. The student should aim at attaining the ability to understand the language

as it appears on the printed page, without rearrangement of words to correspond to the order of words in his own language and without translation into his native tongue. To attain this end the four means above-mentioned are necessary. The truth of this statement needs no proof.

It is here that teachers and students alike are at fault, because they make translation the end and aim of all their efforts, neglecting the three other necessary means to a proper understanding of a language. If a student only translates he never gets an insight into a language. He needs to be trained in writing that he may have a firm grasp of the grammar and syntax, in reading aloud that his mind may be trained in quickness of perception, and in learning by heart that he may gain a genuine feeling for the language. Given a continuous and persistent use of these four means there will come a time when they can be laid aside, because the student has attained the end to which they were the means.

Any teacher of ancient languages who has endeavored to have his pupils do anything more than translate into their mother tongue knows how difficult a thing it is. As long as a student translates each day a definite amount assigned by his teacher he is satisfied, and when, after a certain number of years spent in this kind of work, he finds that translation is still slow and he apparently does not increase his ability to read the literature, he gives up in despair of ever being able to read with the same ease with which he can read a modern language. Instead of taking a part at least of the blame on himself, he puts it all on his teacher or on the language. In saying this I do not mean that the student alone is at fault, but it is an undeniable fact that students do not expend an equal amount of effort on ancient and modern languages, or perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that they will not make use of the same means in learning an ancient and a modern language.

The odes of Horace are not understood when three books of them have been rapidly translated into bungling English, and yet it is next to impossible to get a student to do more, as those who have tried it know. If a student is asked to learn some of the odes by heart, to read them all aloud in their proper meters, in a word to become so familiar with them that he understands them in approximately the same way that he understands English poems, there is apt to be a rebellion, or at least an effort so slight that the teacher is liable to give up in despair and return to the old daily stumbling translation.

The college instructor finds that pupils come to him without any definite knowledge of the language in regard to forms and syntax. Apparently they have translated all that is demanded by the college entrance requirements, but all too often they fail in answering the simplest questions concerning gram-

mar and syntax which are the necessary basis of the power to translate. There are reasons for this. Most people look upon the ancient languages as unpractical. Students are infected with the same opinion and do not exert themselves. Translation into the vernacular is made the end and aim. The college entrance requirements are too great and seemingly place emphasis on amount rather than ability, although this is not intended.

If teachers and students alike will keep continually in mind the fact that they are working to gain the ability to read the language as it stands on the printed page and will use the means which will bring about this ability, there will be no cry that students of the ancient languages never learn to read them. The teacher should not become disheartened, but should keep everlastingly at it. If he does his pupils will find that they are really gaining in power and the stigma which the Classics now bear will be gradually removed.

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DISSOLUTUS

On the passage *Cupio, patres conscripti, me esse clementem, cupio in tantis rei publicae periculis me non dissolutum videri, sed iam me ipse inertiae nequitiaeque condemno* (Cic. Cat. 1. 2. 4), I have looked into the commentaries of eleven school editions of Cicero published in this country. Nine of these interpret *dissolutum* as 'lax', 'remiss', 'neglectful of duty'. I submit that this idea is exactly antipodal to the thought which this word was intended by Cicero to convey. The evidence for my view is:

I. Internal. It seems manifest that the second clause carries on the same line of thought as the first; the adversative thought does not begin before the word *sed*. *Cupio . . . cupio* bears every appearance of being an anaphora, the two members of which cannot be adversative. *Non dissolutum*, therefore, must be a litotes for approximately the same idea as *clementem*; *dissolutus* accordingly means 'headstrong', 'acting strenuously without calm forethought and sufficient reason', 'intemperate', 'bull-headed'. The translation should be: 'I wish . . . to be calm, without rancor or prejudice; in times of so great danger to the government I do not wish to seem headstrong: but now I condemn myself for inactivity and inefficiency. This goes closely with the sentence that follows and should not be put in a separate paragraph.

II. External. *Dissolutus* primarily means 'free of restraint'. The reference may be to¹:

(1) the restraint of the law. Cf. Phaedr. 1. 2. 12 *dissolutos mores compescere*, said of the frogs who had no king or government; Cic. Verr. 2. 3.

¹ Mr. Bradley's list of passages under each subdivision, unless otherwise stated, aims to be exhaustive.—C. K.